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Parliamentary Human Rights Group

From Lord Avebury
1986 December 17

Dear Mr van den Broek,

When the Portuguese President Dr Mario Soares visited Britain in October, I had the honour of meeting him to discuss the question of East Timor. In the course of the meeting I raised the question of the four East Timorese students - Antonino Goncalves, Joao da Camara, Fernando Soares and Abilio Sereno - who had just then asked for the protection of your Embassy in Jakarta, and were requesting the Dutch authorities to facilitate their asylum in Portugal. He was good enough to make a note of the matter and I was very pleased to receive a telex from him later to say that the request was being sympathetically considered. Then I learned that the Portuguese authorities had agreed to issue them with passports and air tickets to Lisbon.

However, I was dismayed when first the Dutch Embassy declined to let them stay on their premises, exposing them to serious risk, and then stipulated that before they could hand over the Portuguese passports, the asylum seekers had to obtain exit visas from the Indonesian oppressors. This was not a condition the Portuguese had felt it necessary to impose.

The young people have now been in suspense for almost two months, and are at ever greater risk as the time passes. Being unable to work, they are entirely destitute. In the spirit of Christmas, I do beg Your Excellency to give instructions that your Embassy in Jakarta hand over the passports and tickets now.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Avebury.

H E the Foreign Minister,
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